



Martin Edmond

Te Whare o
Rehua A Whanganui biography
Sarjeant Gallery

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Previous: Frank Denton,
The Sarjeant Gallery, 1926.

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Foreword

The story of Te Whare o Rehua Sarjeant Gallery takes place through layers and echoes of different timelines and timescales. This book's narrative tracks the building's one hundred-plus years of history but does so—as does the gallery's redevelopment—to set the scene for the next one hundred-plus years.

Of course, this all builds on a much deeper history of place that establishes how we can approach the future; it is the story of a building, its environment, the community from which it has grown, and its aspirations.

The redevelopment's addition of new facilities, including a purpose-built collection store, will bring the institution into the twenty-first century and create social spaces that will give us many more opportunities for public access and connections to our community.

Two important drivers of the redevelopment are to better preserve the Sarjeant Gallery's significant collection, keeping it safe for generations yet to come, and to restore the heritage building that was first opened in 1919. This follows the original sentiments of the gallery's founder, Henry Sarjeant, who stated in his will that the gallery would be for the inspiration of future generations. Similarly, prominent local kaumātua Sir Te Atawhai Archie John Taiaroa, after whom the gallery's new wing is named, spoke of our responsibilities beyond our lifetimes and those of our children.

Henry Sarjeant's original bequest, made in 1912, was £30,000 for the construction of a gallery and the procurement of art to form a collection. In 2024 that bequest is the equivalent of NZ\$70 million, which is roughly the cost of the current redevelopment that will future-proof our institution for the next one hundred years.

This book charts a path through these echoing timelines and gives credit to all who have made the Sarjeant Gallery what it is today, especially our previous staff, supporters and volunteers, and notably our first three directors, Gordon Brown, Bill Milbank and Greg Anderson, who all worked tirelessly to build a vision that we can now enjoy as a reality.

I thank those who have been guardians of the Sarjeant, especially the original initiators and supporters Henry Sarjeant, Ellen Neame, Donald Hosie and Charles Mackay, and Nicola Williams, Annette Main and David Cairncross from the recent era. To Te Rūnanga o Tūpoho and the iwi and hapū along the Whanganui River, thank you for your partnership.

There are so many more and your names are in the Sarjeant's heart and in this book: custodians, guardians, trustees, donors, supporters, campaigners, artists and dreamers, who together have ensured that the Sarjeant Gallery would live on to inspire, educate, welcome and connect for another one hundred years.

Andrew Clifford
Director
Te Whare o Rehua
Sarjeant Gallery

Ans Westra, *Majestic Square,*
Wanganui, 1993.



Introduction

Whanganui, in my childhood called Wanganui, was my first city. It was a couple of hours away from where we lived in Ohakune. We would drive in the Hillman stationwagon along the Raetihi Road, then south down the Parapara, unsealed in the 1960s and a tricky route at the best of times. It was often closed by slips. When it had been raining, the papa clay slid out of the sodden cliffs and onto the road, creating fans of glistening grey rubble you couldn't get around.

We went to Whanganui to go Christmas shopping and for other reasons. When my grandfather became ill, he consulted controversial therapist Dr Ulric Williams in Aramoho, to no avail. He died in 1953, and with the money my mother inherited she bought a Challen upright from Colliers Piano and Musical Warehouse in Victoria Avenue. The building is still there. The Challen was the piano preferred by the BBC in the postwar years; there are two in Abbey Road Studios.

My second city was Napier, where, after her husband's untimely death, my grandmother lived alone. We went camping at Kennedy Park in the summer holidays. That extravagant Art Deco town, reposing in what seemed like eternal sunlight by the blue ocean of the bay, was very different from the wooden-fronted, chiaroscuro city with its corrugated iron verandahs looking out over the brown river. Whanganui seemed older, more shadowy and more strange; more like Ohakune perhaps, a larger version of my home town. I remember Victoria Avenue at night as a glitter of lights, its shop windows shining with promise. Maybe I would find my long-desired electric train set in some emporium there. Alas, I never did.

We had the *Wanganui Chronicle*, the morning newspaper, delivered, and on occasion both my father and my mother contributed to it, anonymously, as 'Our Waimarino correspondent'. In 1961, after my class at Ohakune Primary went on a school trip to the River City, travelling by bus down the Parapara, a photograph appeared in the *Chronicle* of some of us standing in front of a machine in a Whanganui factory.

I am in the centre of the picture, wearing the blue jersey my mother knitted (though the photo is black and white) and gazing with fierce perplexity at what I now realise was an industrial lathe. For years I thought it was a printing press, but that must have been a misapprehension occasioned by the photograph's appearance in a newspaper. Next to me is a blond boy called Robert Sutton and on my other side a shy, pretty, dark-haired girl named Colleen, whose surname I have forgotten.

Even then, in the early 1960s, Whanganui seemed mysterious in ways that the sunlit dream town of Napier was not. When it rained, and mist swirled off the river and infiltrated the streets behind Somme Parade and Taupō Quay, figures loomed up out of the murk like revenants and it felt as if the city was older than its years and carried in its bones memories of other cities, perhaps even cities from antiquity.

It was a garrison town, after all, an outpost of empire. There are still laneways which seem to lead away from the present into the past or into some parallel netherworld. For a New Zealand city, Whanganui is old, as old as Wellington, 'The Empire City', of which it was a satellite town, founded in 1841. Sometimes it can seem as spectral and as malign as the Klynham of Ronald Hugh Morrieson's 1963 novel *The Scarecrow*. At other times it is as cosmopolitan as London.

On one of my early visits—perhaps on the school trip, perhaps while Christmas shopping—I remember looking up Maria Place and seeing the Sarjeant Gallery, white and resplendent on Sandfly Hill, now known as Pukenua Queen’s Park. I don’t think I knew that it was an art gallery and I don’t remember going there. I probably thought it was a war memorial; or, more fancifully, a pagan temple of the kind I read about in the popular accounts of Greek mythology I devoured as a child. A temple to Hermes, perhaps, my favourite among the gods. In a way I wasn’t wrong: the Sarjeant is both a war memorial and a temple. However, it is a war memorial begun during, not after, the war, and a temple dedicated not to a god but to the arts, and therefore secular rather than sacred; though of course for many people the arts are sacred.



And then there was the river... When, in 1974, I moved from Auckland to Wellington in order to complete a Bachelor of Arts, I learned I would have to do a unit in a foreign language to be awarded the degree; that ‘foreign’ language, paradoxically, could be te reo Māori. During the course of the unit I played a couple of small parts in a production of *Te Raukura: The Feathers of the Albatross*, written in 1972 by Harry Dansey, directed by Brian Potiki for the Victoria University Te Reo Māori Society and staged at the Ngāti Pōneke hall down at Pipitea in Thorndon. While mostly concerned with events in Taranaki—that is, with Pai Mārire and Parihaka—the play nevertheless reawakened my interest in the Whanganui and I conceived a plan of going up the river by boat to find its source.

I may have been remembering lines from a song, of unknown provenance, which my mother used to play and sing: ‘Two Māori boys in their canoe / out on the broad Whanganui’. There was a sepia photograph by the Burton Brothers on the cover of the sheet music. That journey, to where Te Awa Tupua rises, on the western slopes of Tongariro (Matua-te-toa), never eventuated but I did begin to learn about other prophetic movements, including Māramatanga, based in Ohakune. I recalled that in Bracken and Moore streets, across the way from Maungārongo marae on Burns Street, there were picket fences with the tops of their palings carved into the hearts, clubs, diamonds and spades of the four suits in a pack of cards. Or, alternatively, with a crescent moon enclosing a five-pointed star, the whetū mārāma of the Rātana movement.

I remember passing through Whanganui on a misty, golden evening in the summer of 1976/77. Alan Brunton and I were on our way to New Plymouth to interview Len Lye at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. The transcript appeared in the Red Mole publication *Spleen #7*, the penultimate issue of that short-lived magazine, along with a suite of photographs, *From the Mars Hotel*, by Peter Peryer. Red Mole returned to Whanganui early in 1978 on our *Goin’ to Djibouti* tour.

We stayed in a motel out at Castlecliff and played to packed houses at the Four Seasons Theatre on Pūtiki Drive in Pūtiki. Our contact was a fellow called Gareth Jones, who drove around town in a powder-blue sports car with the top down. Four Seasons had been set up in 1970 by David Smiles, who was from Pātea, and it continued as a professional theatre, mostly doing musicals, for 30 years.

I revisited Whanganui several times in the course of researching my 1999 book *The Resurrection of Philip Clairmont*; his retrospective was curated out of the Sarjeant in 1987. On one occasion I stayed in a motel adjoining Spriggins Park, where my father, a private in the army, was stationed in 1941. One of the friends he lost in the war, Paetahi Metekingi, was from Pūtiki. They were at Teachers' Training College in Wellington together. Pat died, unaccountably, at Faenza in Italy when a German shell hit the villa where he and others were preparing for a party at the HQ of the 28th (Māori) Battalion in January 1945.

After the war my father helped Pat's wife, Marie, re-establish herself; she had to leave her sole-charge school at Matahiwi on the river and move to Wellington. As Marie Bell, she became 'an educator and a tireless campaigner for the rights of both children and parents'.

The first time I revisited Whanganui on a research trip, Philip Clairmont's mother, Thelma, was renting a house in Maxwell Avenue on Durie Hill and I went up there to meet her. Another time, on my way out to Mangamahu, where Phil lived at the Flying Hotel in 1981/82, I stopped off for a night at the Grand Hotel in St Hill Street. Even though these days it is a bit down on its uppers, I have stayed there many times since.

These were my first visits, insofar as I recall, to the Sarjeant Gallery itself. Nothing therein contradicted my childish idea that it was a kind of temple: its interior spaces had the bare elegance that inspires worship, even awe, even now. When Michael Dunn and I curated a small exhibition, *Militant Artists ReUnion*, consisting of 10 works each by Philip Clairmont, Tony Fomison and Allen Maddox, at the Hawke's Bay Exhibition Centre in Hastings in 2004, it was also shown at the Sarjeant; to my great regret I was not able to see it there.



In 2018, out of the blue, I received an invitation to write a book about Te Whare o Rehua Sarjeant Gallery. I wrote back to the gallery's relationships officer Jaki Arthur explaining that I did not live in Aotearoa New Zealand but in Sydney, Australia; perhaps there had been some misunderstanding? No, she said, it was not a mistake and I should take the offer seriously. Jaki posited the book as the biography of a building rather than a history of the gallery, which I thought was an interesting idea.



I reviewed my personal contacts over the years with the city of Whanganui and with the gallery itself, as summarised above. Then I did some preliminary research, during which I discovered that the life of the Sarjeant has been one of high drama, remarkable achievement, grief and heartache as well as joy: all ingredients of a compelling biography.

Jaki sketched out for me the controversy over the authorship of the architectural drawings for the heritage building, of which I was unaware; and outlined plans for the new extension, to be called Te Pātaka o Tā Te Atawhai Archie John Taiaroa. I did know something of the two great mayoral controversies, the one in 1920 involving the arrest of Charles Mackay for the attempted murder of a poet, and the other consequent upon the election of Michael Laws to that office in 2004. I had also, after my book on Colin McCahon came out in 2011, exchanged a number of long, chatty letters on diverse subjects with Gordon Brown, the first director of the professional era, who was then living in active retirement on Waiheke Island.

I knew Bill Milbank, the longest-serving director, by reputation as a man of ability and integrity. He died in November 2023, while this book was in production. When I looked into his life story I learned he was born at the Waimarino Maternity Hospital in Raetihi, as I was, and educated at Ruapehu College in Ohakune, where my father taught from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. Further, his art teacher during those years, Stan Frost, was a close family friend of ours and also my godfather. Subsequently, Bill told me that Stan had had a decisive effect upon his choice of career. At that point I realised this was an offer I could not refuse. To do so would have been to perturb, perhaps anger, the ancestors.

In 2008, in an interview with Paul Diamond, Bill Milbank described Whanganui as 'a city of intrigue'. When Paul asked him to expand upon this enigmatic remark, he said: 'Well, a river runs through it.' He was referring to something more than the geographical division. He was saying Whanganui was divided between the old families, many of whom derived their wealth from farming, on the one side, and the business and working people on the other.

Or, alternatively, between those who embrace the arts and those who do not see the need for them. Given that the subject of the interview was Mayor Charles Mackay, he could also have been speaking about the division between those who acknowledge sexual diversity and those who wish to deny or suppress it. He could even have been talking about a racial divide.

None of these fractures is simple and nor do they necessarily align in any obvious way with each other. The point Milbank was making was not about division but about the need to unite people across the fault lines that exist in any community. His own efforts as director of the gallery were always towards the healing of divisions, by means of the nurturing of relationships and the celebration of the arts, especially the visual arts.

This attitude—of positivity, confidence and belief—has paid off, notably under the directorship of Milbank’s successor, Greg Anderson, who directed the gallery with exemplary efficiency from 2007 until 2022.

A great deal of rebuilding work was done in Whanganui over that period; subsequent to the alarming events of the first decade of the twenty-first century, during the Michael Laws mayoralty, unity now prevails, both in the community and at the Sarjeant itself and also in the all-important relationship between gallery and city council. It is as if the vision enshrined in Henry Sarjeant’s original bequest, after a century of vicissitudes, some quite extreme, is finally coming to fruition.

With the reopening, in 2024, of the renovated and earthquake-strengthened heritage building, and the opening of Te Pātaka, the gallery’s extension, a new era is about to begin. Perhaps that is an overly optimistic view; nevertheless, it is both the premise, and the conclusion, of the biography that follows.

1

Beginnings

The land upon which Whanganui city is built rose up from under the sea a million years ago. This event was the most recent of the 50 or so rises and falls of the Whanganui Basin which have taken place during the epochs known collectively as the Neogene: the Miocene (23.03–5.33 million years ago), the Pliocene (5.33–2.58 mya) and the Pleistocene (2.58 mya–11,000 years ago).

Now that we are in the Holocene (or a new epoch called the Anthropocene; or even the Chthulucene), the basin—oval in shape and extending from the margins of the Volcanic Plateau in the central North Island all the way out into the South Taranaki Bight—is half under water. At present the southern part is sinking while the northern part is rising. Its strata encode the most complete marine stratigraphic records for the Neogene known anywhere in the world, in which the falls and rises in sea level, and the attendant extinctions and transformations of life forms, can be traced.

The basin consists mostly of sedimentary rocks. That part where the city stands includes material, mostly volcanic in origin, washed down from the mountains by Te Awa Tupua, the Whanganui River. The most recent major event, less than two thousand years ago, was the Hatepe eruption of the Taupō caldera, so large that meteorological phenomena associated with it were observed as far away as Han Dynasty China.

One of the features of the site is a pair of sandhills accreted above the bend the river takes as it turns south-west then west towards the sea. The smaller of these hills is called Patupohau, perhaps Patupuwhao—a contested name. The other, larger and to the north, nearer to the river bend, is Pukenuamu or Sandfly Hill. Pukenuamu was a fortified pā in pre-European and early colonial times. From the late 1840s it was a barracks for British imperial troops. After that it became a rookery where the poor, the homeless and the criminal gathered. Then it was a war memorial. Since 1919 it has been the site of Te Whare o Rehua Sarjeant Gallery.



Kupe, the early Polynesian navigator from Hawaiki, an historical figure who has taken on the lineaments of legend, came ashore a thousand years ago at the mouth of the river, which he called Te Kaihau o Kupe, the place where Kupe ate the wind, because of the incessant winds that blew there and blow there still. He sailed his double-hulled waka, *Matabourua*, upriver as far as Kauarapāoa. He said he found nobody living along the banks, which were forested and loud with birdsong, but sensed the presence of apu aparoa, flocks of spirits. He distinguished the calls of the weka, the pīwakawaka and the kōkako, whose cry is like a human voice, before turning around and sailing back down to the sea and thence up the coast to Pātea to plant karaka trees. Other traditions say there were already people living along the river when Kupe came, who disguised their presence by imitating the cries of birds.

There are only two sources for what happened before humans began keeping written records: oral histories, which are always partisan in that they reflect the traditions and preoccupations of those who tell them; and the archaeological record, which is partial because the remains it studies are fragmentary, enigmatic and represent an unknown proportion of what once existed, and so become easy prey for speculation. Nor can it be assumed that the two are complementary.

They may augment each other to some extent but they are shaped by different views, understandings and intentions. One is an attempt at objective description. The other is concerned with continuities and past, present and future relationships of living communities. Suffice to say that the executive summary of the 1999 *Whanganui River Report* begins by stating that the hapū of Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi have held the Whanganui River for a millennium.

Both Abel Tasman, in 1642, and James Cook, in 1769, sailed past the mouth of the river without recording it on their maps, perhaps because their ships were too far out to sea. At that time there was a strip of unforested land about 25 kilometres wide stretching along the west coast of Te Ika-a-Māui (the North Island), all the way from Taranaki to Te Upoko o te Ika (Wellington). North of the river mouth, most of this country was covered in bracken and fern; south of it grew toetoe, harakeke, mānuka and tī kōuka. Most people lived along this belt of land, but there were as many as 80 kāinga or settlements built along the banks of the river and numerous pā (fortifications) on the high cliffs overlooking the deep green water which, when the kōwhai was flowering, smelled of honey. All around was what ethnologist and surveyor Stephenson Percy Smith called 'the great forest'.

This forest extended, without a break, from the Manukau Heads to Waikanae: a length of 600 kilometres with a width of 30 to 90 kilometres. People lived and gardened on its margins, making regular excursions into the bush to obtain birds, kiore, berries, timber and other resources. Apart from the paths that ran through it, and some remote kāinga, it was, in the main, untraversed and uninhabited, the thick forest forming a barrier against incursions. Those who travelled through it did so in a spirit of awe and wonder, if not in fear. The Whanganui, because it was navigable for most of its length, was a way through the great forest: a river road which Māori of many iwi and hapū used to travel up and down the island.

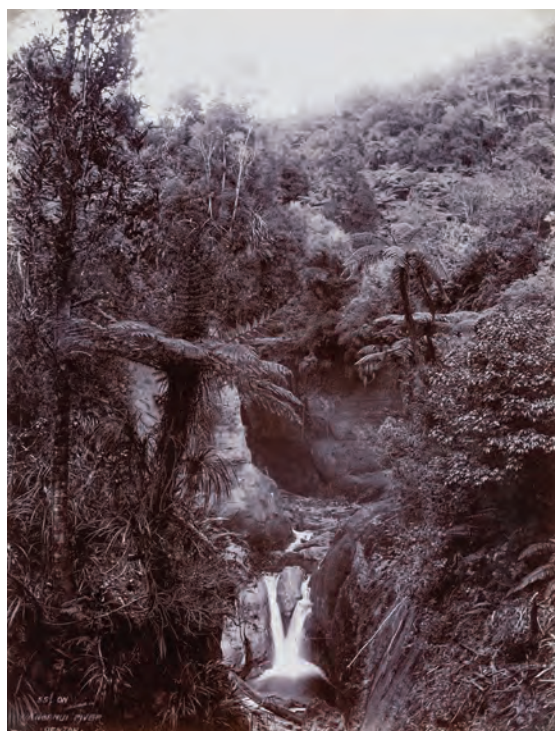


The first recorded interaction between Māori and Pākehā on the Whanganui took place in 1831, by which time the confused and bloody period of inter-tribal conflict known as the Musket Wars (c. 1818–45) had been going on for a decade and a half. It was an arms race in which those who had guns exacted revenge upon, conquered or exterminated those who did not; while those who did not, to prevent themselves being wiped out, did everything in their power to acquire them.

In 1819 a taua or war party made up of warriors from Ngāpuhi, led by Patuone, and Ngāti Toa and Ngāti Raukawa, under Te Rauparaha, attacked Pūrua Pā at the base of Kuriarapana Durie Hill, opposite Pukenua. They paddled by night on reed rafts across the water and took Pūrua by surprise. After razing a number of other settlements, the taua became trapped in the gorges of the upper river, and opposed by Whanganui forces led by Te Pēhi Tūroa. The stand-off was resolved in favour of mana whenua by means

Left: Frank Denton,
Nikau Palms, c.1905.

Right: Frank Denton, *On
Wanganui River*, c.1905.



of single combat; the taiaha with which it was won is in the Whanganui Museum. Pūrua was where Te Pēhi stayed when he came down the river to the sea.

Two years later Hōri Kīngi Te Ānaua repulsed a party of Tainui warriors at Mangatoa, north of Koriniti. Then in 1829 Te Rauparaha, returning south to his new home on Kāpiti Island, and seeking revenge for the earlier defeat upon the river, attacked Pūtiki Pā, then situated on a fortified hill called Taumata Karoro behind the present site. After a siege of two months the pā fell, was destroyed, and its inhabitants massacred, leaving hundreds of bones scattered upon the ground, to be buried 10 years later by Anglican missionary Richard Taylor.

Some rangatira were let go and others escaped upriver where, again, as in the confrontation in 1819, they were likened to crayfish retreating into their holes; the river was te kōura putu roa, the crayfish lair. In 1832 there was a pitched battle between Whanganui and Taranaki people on the open ground before Pukenamu. There are competing claims, from Taranaki iwi Ngāti Ruanui and Ngā Rauru, to ownership of Sandfly Hill. Other traditions say Pukenamu belongs to Ngā Paerangi, one of the hapū of Te Āti Haunui-a-Pāpārangi.



The year before that battle, in January 1831, at Kāpiti, north of Wellington, three men from the Taupō district recognised, in the store of a whaler and trader called Joseph Rowe, two mokomōkai, preserved tattooed heads, belonging to rangatira of their iwi. When they asked Rowe to give them back he laughed in their faces. Mokomōkai were a lucrative item of trade at the time, and Rowe, who supplied Te Rauparaha with guns and ammunition, intended to use them to make money, probably by selling them to visiting ships. Many ‘baked heads’ ended up as curiosities on the streets of Sydney or in other overseas ports. Sometimes they were the heads of slaves tattooed for sale; sometimes they were, as in this case, either trophies of war or purloined family heirlooms. They were usually exchanged for muskets and powder.

The men from Ngāti Tūwharetoa, whom the principal written source for this story, Richard Taylor, names as Puta, Te Wetu (perhaps Whetu) and his father Tapuae, learned that Rowe was planning an expedition to the Whanganui to obtain more mokomōkai. They travelled ahead of him and lay in wait in the dunes below the river mouth. Rowe, with a crew of four—three whites and ‘a coloured man’—rowed up the coast in a whale boat and came ashore at Wahi Puna, on the eastern bank just inside the river mouth. The Māori invited Rowe and the others to join them in a meal they had prepared.

After they had eaten, Puta went and sat down in the whale boat. Rowe told one of his men, Andrew Powers, to get him out of there but Powers refused. When Rowe went to do it himself, he was killed by a blow to the head from Puta's tomahawk. Powers went to his aid and was also struck, falling into the water, but he did not die. The other two white men were killed but the 'coloured' man was freed. It is not known who he was or what happened to him. He was most likely a sailor from the Caribbean or an escaped slave from somewhere in the Americas.

Rowe's and one of the other men's bodies were cooked and eaten; their heads were removed and preserved in the usual fashion, for sale. Powers was spared and accompanied the group of Māori north, living with them for several months.

The ariki or paramount chief of Tūwharetoa, Mananui Te Heuheu Tūkinu II, was furious with his men for killing Pākehā and so disturbing the peace. Consequently they left the Taupō area, with Powers, and travelled to Maketū in the Bay of Plenty, where a flax trader called David Scott persuaded a retired Danish ship's captain turned merchant to give them 25 kilograms of tobacco in exchange for Powers' freedom. The captain also redeemed the heads of the two Pākehā.

When Powers saw the heads he asked what had happened to the third man. He was told that he had cried out in fear as his death approached and was beaten so badly his head was not worth preserving. Nor was his body eaten, lest his cowardice enter into those who consumed him. He was buried in the dunes instead. Powers returned to the Whanganui to live to a ripe old age, and to tell his story to Richard Taylor.



There may have been other encounters between Māori and Pākehā at Whanganui; if so, accounts of them were not written down. Attempts were made in the 1830s, by Christian Māori converts from Taranaki, to proselytise along the river; they mostly ended badly. Some stories survive of the activities of a gunpowder trader named 'Scotch Jock' Nicholl—'the man with black hands'—and his wife Kahe Te Rau-o-te-rangi.

The official history begins with the machinations of the New Zealand Company as it attempted to purchase land upon which to build a city; with the interventions of missionaries who tried to ameliorate the damage these unscrupulous adventurers might cause; and with the efforts of mana whenua to safeguard their rangatiratanga while at the same time adapting to the opportunities and dangers the colonists brought with them.

Edward Jerningham Wakefield, son of Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the principal of the New Zealand Company, began negotiating land purchases at Whanganui soon after he arrived in New Zealand on the *Tory* in August 1839. He was just 19 years of age and one of a party of colonists which included his uncle, Colonel William Wakefield, as agent; Charles Heaphy, draughtsman; and Ernst Dieffenbach, scientist.



Drawing by John Alexander Gilfillan dating from the mid-1840s and showing the early settlement that would become Whanganui.

Off Waikanae in mid-November, Jerningham Wakefield met three Whanganui chiefs who came out to the ship to kōrero. 'They heard,' he wrote, 'all the usual explanations, described the boundaries within which their claims lay, and, after receiving a fowling-piece [shotgun] each in part payment, signed a deed which had been translated to them.'

Two of them returned to shore but the third, whom Wakefield called Kuru Kānga, remained on board ship as a guide, translator and advocate. Kuru was put ashore at Whanganui while the *Tory* continued north, stopping at the future site of New Plymouth and at the Hokianga where, 15 years before, an earlier iteration of the New Zealand Company claimed to have made land purchases. They crossed the island to visit one of the Church Missionary Society stations at the Bay of Islands. Here Wakefield first met his nemesis, the Anglican missionary Henry Williams.

The company was then under extreme pressure: five ships carrying migrants, about a thousand in all, would arrive during the first half of 1840. Those on board had been told to expect land upon which to settle, but no such land had yet been secured. After a purchase agreement was signed for the site upon which the city of Wellington would be built, Wakefield returned to Whanganui. It was early in 1840 and he had been relieved of secretarial duties to his uncle by the arrival, on the *Cuba*, of a bona fide clerk. By then he had another chiefly guide, Te Rangi Wakaruru, the father of Kuru Kānga, with whom he was to rendezvous at Waikanae.

Te Rangi provided him with eight men to carry his baggage overland from Port Nicholson. It included 'blankets, shirts, tobacco, pipes, axes, powder and shot, fish-hooks, beads, two double-barrelled guns besides my own fowling-piece, a little biscuit, log-books, and pencils'. At Waikanae Te Rangi joined him as planned, and they loaded all the gear into a waka with a sail, travelling the rest of the way by sea.

After crossing the bar they camped at Wahi Puna and sent word of their arrival to Pūtiki. Kuru came and escorted them onto the marae. Wakefield recorded that he found 'about thirty large canoes ranged along the shore, and 300 or 400 people assembled to receive me'. Hōri Kingi Te Ānau showed him a document in English that read: 'Wanganui, December 17th, 1839—This is to give notice that this part of New Zealand has been purchased of [sic] the native chiefs residing here for the benefit of the *Ngatiawa* tribes, extending from *Rangitikei* to *Patea*, towards *Taranaki*, by Henry Williams.'

When this was translated into te reo, Te Ānau and other chiefs denied, vehemently, that this was the case. They said they had not received so much as a fish-hook from Williams. They believed the paper was a character reference left by the missionary to reassure other travellers of the peaceful intentions of local Māori. Wakefield wrote 'arrant falsehood' upon the reverse of the document and handed it back. It's unclear whether Williams ever read this annotation, which was of course intended for his eyes.

Williams' visit to Whanganui, and the drawing up of his rather perfunctory deed of sale, were part of a deliberate strategy by the Church Missionary Society, with the support of the British government, to buy land themselves and hold it in trust for Māori, thereby preventing the wholesale takeover of the country by the New Zealand Company. Indeed, the Treaty of Waitangi, first signed on 6 February 1840 and then toured in various forms around both the main islands spruiking for signatures, was in part an instrument designed to thwart the grandiose and frequently mendacious designs of the company.

Wakefield's own land purchase was finalised during his third visit to the Whanganui, in May 1840, on board the 30-ton schooner *Surprise*, owned by a sealer called McGregor who was on his way north from Wellington to return some local people to their homes. Wakefield's arrival coincided with another visit by Henry Williams, this time in the company of fellow missionary Octavius Hadfield, and bearing with him a copy of the Treaty of Waitangi. Wakefield, who did not meet the missionaries on this occasion, said that at Pūtiki they had obtained three signatures in exchange for red blankets. Later one of the three who signed said he thought he had given his signature as a receipt for the blanket.

Wakefield's own signing took place aboard the *Surprise*, where 27 names were inscribed upon the deed of sale he had drawn up. His interpreter was a local man, a whaler by the name of Brooks. The distribution of goods took place afterwards, at Pākaitore, later known as Moutoa Gardens, on the opposite side of the river from Pūtiki, and a traditional location for trading exchanges. The merchandise had been stacked in seven piles upon the ground in order that it might be equitably shared, but the fervent anticipation and consequent excitement ahead of the distribution was such that this proved impossible and a *mêlée* ensued.

Wakefield, watching salaciously from on board ship, wrote that 'with a telescope could be distinguished brandished weapons, clenched fists, torn blankets, uplifted boxes'. The £700 worth of goods, including muskets and gunpowder, tomahawks, clothing, red blankets, tobacco, jew's-harps, fish-hooks, umbrellas, beads and a variety of other trade goods, was, he claimed, payment for 16,175 hectares of land on both sides of the river. Māori, thinking it was a gift exchange, not a sale, gave 30 pigs and 10 tons of potatoes in return. It is also certain that some of those who had customary rights over the land were not in attendance. Wakefield might not have known this; if he did, he probably didn't care. He had what he considered sufficient title to the land, and so it proved.

Subsequently, after Christmas 1840, a New Zealand Company surveyor named Frederic Alonzo Carrington arrived on the schooner *Jane*, with six assistants, and began marking out a city to be called Petre, after William, 11th Baron Petre, chairman of the New Zealand Company. Carrington laid







Previous: William Mein Smith, *Town of Petre on the Wanganui River, in September 1841*, printed by Avon Fine Prints and published in 1967.

Above: Plan of the Town of Petre in the District of Wanganui, 1850.



out both sides of the river in a grid pattern. Blocks were 10 chains by five (200 × 100 metres), separated by 20-metre-wide streets (except for Victoria Avenue, which was 25). Parks, marketplaces, a square and a crescent were included in the plan.

Spaces were allocated for police stations, a jail, schools, churches and a hospital. The first settlers arrived in February 1841 and began to build wooden huts with raupō cladding in which to live. For the rest of that year the schooners *Surprise*, *Sandfly*, *Harriet* and *Elizabeth* carried settlers and general cargo up from Wellington, and took back loads of pork, hams, bacon and potatoes.

A traveller in the colony at this time characterised Petre as ‘one of the unwholesome, mushroom settlements engendered by the New Zealand Company for the purpose of removing to a distance a portion of the clamorous script-holders who, on arriving from England, looked, and looked in vain, for their land’. From the beginning there was confusion about where the promised land was and who it really belonged to. Nevertheless, there’s no doubt that Pukenamū, at least insofar as Pākehā were concerned, was included in the purchase: in the city plan it was designated Queen’s Park while its neighbouring sandhill, Patupuhou, would become the site of Cooks Gardens.



In January 1841 the Colonial Office of the Imperial Government in London, having granted the New Zealand Company a Royal Charter, appointed William Spain, a lawyer and former private secretary to future English prime minister Lord Palmerston, as Land Claims Commissioner. His task was to investigate the legality of the company’s purchases. He arrived in Auckland in December 1841 and began work in Wellington in May of the following year. Most of the company’s dealings did not survive his scrutiny. Spain decided that it had made valid purchases in just two of the areas it claimed—Manawatū and New Plymouth; subsequently the New Plymouth sale also turned out to be flawed.

Spain visited Whanganui and held a hearing that lasted for three weeks. He ruled, in 1844, that the New Zealand Company was entitled to land on the western side of the river only—where the city had already begun to be built—and that even this claim was deficient in some respects. Nevertheless, he accepted that the settlers who had bought land from the company had done so in good faith. Rather than ordering the disputed land returned to its original owners, he decided it should go to the Crown; and that the company (at William Wakefield’s suggestion) should pay monetary compensation to Māori instead.

Spain also ruled that the formula for determining the amount of compensation was to be decided by the company itself: hardly an equitable solution. Wakefield, who had initially obstructed Spain’s work, eventually offered Whanganui Māori £1000 in gold and silver coins, which was at first refused then later accepted.

The Rutland Stockade on
Pukenamu, photographed as
part of a panorama in 1872.
Ruapehu is in the far distance.



In 1846 the purchase of another 16,175 hectares north of the town was attempted but the government was unable to finalise the transaction because of further conflict. In the aftermath of the Wairau Incident in Nelson, during which Arthur Wakefield, another uncle of Jerningham's, had been killed, fighting broke out in the Hutt Valley. Some 200 Ngāti Hāua-te-rangi under Hēmi Tōpine Te Mamaku joined Te Rangihaeata's campaign against Pākehā settlement there. They were from the Whanganui but had relatives in, and rights to, the Hutt. They led the attack on Boulcott's Farm.

There had been talk, because of the fighting, of abandoning Petre in late 1844, but at a public meeting settlers voted to stay. Now the proposal was mooted again. 'It would be no bad plan,' wrote a correspondent to the Wellington *Independent* on 7 July 1846, 'to remove the whole of the colonists from the north to the Middle Island [the name then for the South Island], reimbursing the settlers in some way for their outlay.' The government did not agree. The new governor, the bellicose George Grey, decided instead to fortify the town.

The warship HMS *Calliope*, the brig HMS *Victoria* and 200 men of the 58th Rutlandshire Regiment of Foot, along with some Royal Engineers and Royal Artillery, arrived with their big guns in December 1846 and began digging in. The settlers had already constructed a 'lower stockade'. Now the soldiers built on Pukenamu, the former fighting pā, what became known as the Rutland Stockade. Made mostly from local timber, the structure also incorporated corrugated iron and was completed in April 1847. The smaller York Stockade was built nearby in June–July 1847 and Whanganui remained a garrison town for the next quarter of a century.

Te Mamaku, who had returned to the river, opposed the military presence in the town, leading to an outbreak of hostilities. The inciting incident took place inside the stockade. Hapurona Ngārangi, an old man employed to weave raupō as cladding for the house of a naval cadet off the *Calliope* named Crozier, was shot by him in the face. When it came time to pay for the work, Crozier, a very young man, pretended to refuse and, pulling out a small pistol, threatened in a jocular manner to shoot Ngārangi. The gun went off and the bullet hit the kaumātua in the cheek. Not everyone thought it was an accident and a group of Māori gathered outside the stockade, demanding Crozier be given up to them if, as expected, Ngārangi died. The request was denied but the garrison surgeon was directed by his superiors to treat the wounded man, who did in time recover.

A few days later a group of six young Māori men attacked a farm in the Matarawa Valley near Okoia, north of Fordell and east of Whanganui, where Scottish artist and farmer John Alexander Gilfillan, his wife Mary and six children lived on 45 hectares that had been purchased from the New Zealand Company along with a section in Guyton Street in town, where the family lived while their farmhouse was being built. There were also two babies, their grandchildren, at the house that night. The attack may have been a simple act of adventurism—the 'men' were all aged between 12 and 18—or it may have been part of a larger strategy.